



## **Senator Heitkamp's Work to Support Native American Veterans**

Senator Heitkamp has traveled across North Dakota to personally listen to veterans and Native American communities about their challenges – and she has worked directly with Native veterans, veterans service officers, veterans service organizations, and advocates to develop commonsense solutions. Heitkamp believes our nation must do more to provide veterans with access to the benefits and resources they have earned protecting our country.

**Connecting Native Veterans with Resources & Support** – In June 2014, Heitkamp held her first Native Veterans Summit at United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, bringing together more than 140 Native veterans, advocates, and officials from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Indian Health Service to provide veterans resources and guidance. Heitkamp led a full-day discussion with Native veterans on challenges they encounter and potential solutions.

**Gathering Resources and Information to Help Native Veterans** – Following her Summit, Heitkamp launched a one-stop-shop webpage to connect Native veterans with information on available benefits and services. The website includes frequently asked questions about benefits and services, online resources, and helpful information, as well as contact information for local, regional, and federal services and resources.

**Introducing Legislation to Support New Veterans** – Taking what she heard from veterans at her first Summit and from subsequent conversations in the state, Heitkamp introduced a bill to connect new veterans – especially those in rural areas – with resources in their communities. Heitkamp's *Connect with Veterans Act* would make it easier for veterans to find jobs, support programs, and ways to connect with fellow veterans. Heitkamp reintroduced the bill in the new Congress with bipartisan support, continuing her push to improve support for veterans in North Dakota and beyond.

**Honoring North Dakota Servicemembers who died in Vietnam** – To honor North Dakotans who made the ultimate sacrifice in Vietnam, Heitkamp delivered 15 speeches over six months on the U.S. Senate floor, paying tribute to more than 160 North Dakotans who gave their lives in the conflict, including 10 Native Americans. To engage younger generations with our state's proud history of military service, she collaborated with Bismarck High School students to gather stories about the fallen heroes. Heitkamp arranged for artifacts the students created honoring fallen Vietnam servicemembers to be displayed in the North Dakota Heritage Center's Native American Hall of Honors. The art display includes artifacts created by Native American students in honor of Native American servicemembers.

**Making the VA Work Better** – Heitkamp took immediate action to address disgraceful scheduling misconduct at VA facilities nationwide. She worked with North Dakota officials to confirm that state VA facilities were not delaying services to veterans. Then, in the U.S. Senate, she helped pass bipartisan legislation addressing the situation. The bill improves access to services – which Heitkamp pushed for – to help rural and Native American veterans access care.

**Leading Efforts to Raise Post-Traumatic Stress Awareness** – Heitkamp has called on the VA and U.S. Department of Defense to raise awareness about challenges veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) face. Understanding the need to provide mental health support, she worked to reduce PTSD stigmas and encourage private partnerships so employers hire veterans. In June – for the third time – the Senate unanimously passed her bipartisan resolution designating June National PTSD Awareness Month and June 27 as National PTSD Awareness Day.

**Listening to Veterans** – Heitkamp has committed herself and her staff to personally help veterans. She regularly attends public events with veterans to answer questions and connect them with resources. In 2013, Heitkamp conducted a six-city state tour, holding roundtables with veterans to discuss obstacles they encounter to accessing critical services. Her staff in the Washington and five state offices work to assist veterans with disability claims and eligibility for non-VA care.